



## TALBOT COUNTY GOVERNMENT

### DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

215 Bay Street, Suite #5 | EASTON, MARYLAND 21601 | (P) 410-770-8058 (F) 410-770-8059

#### **Talbot County Economic Development Commission Meeting Minutes for Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Members Present:** Chairman, Timothy G. Jones; Jean Weisman, Gerald O'Mara, Craig Wanner, Ron Engle, Ted Bautz, Scott Beatty, Jacqueline Wilson, Al Silverstein, Dr. Clay Railey, Andrea Lev, Jennifer Shull

**Members Excused:** Shannon Dill, Peter Dunbar, Terenda Thomas

**Ex Officio Members Present:** R. Andrew Hollis, Jennifer Williams, Mike Henry, Cassandra Vanhooser, Sam Shoge, and Ryan Snow

**Attendees:** Laura Heikes, Tracy Ward, Scott Warner, Debbie Bowden, Bob Shaffer

**Call to Order:** Chairman Jones called the meeting to order, with a quorum, at 8:04 a.m. Mr. Jones announced that EDC meetings will have a different format going forward and welcomed the new economic development and tourism team.

#### **Minutes**

The department was unavailable to provide minutes from the November meeting due to unmentioned circumstances.

**Introduction of New Economic Development Team and Presentation:** Cassandra, Director, introduced Sam Shoge, Economic Development Coordinator, and Ryan Snow, Project Manager for the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, to the EDC. Cassandra began the presentation of the newly merged Department of Economic Development and Tourism- "Moving Forward Together." Cassandra explained that the two departments spend a significant amount of time and resources together. She further explained that a strong economy anchors the future of the county, which includes business retention, attraction of new businesses, business growth and innovation and job creation. Tourism development stems from three main components that include marketing and communications, destination development and visitor services. Together, the merged departments are allies as they work tirelessly to benefit Talbot County. Their alliance creates a synergy with added resources which make them better together.

Next, Sam continued on with the presentation to explain that economic development and tourism are grounded in marketing and communication. The department has "hit the ground running" by meeting with members of the EDC and business community leaders throughout the county. The goal is to re-imagine, recreate and redevelop the image of economic development in Talbot County. Talbot County needs to be "early adopters" in implementing digital and online media streams. Sam went on to explain the most effective marketing strategy for site selectors are websites (82% effectiveness) and meeting with businesses (74% effectiveness), both of which the department will improve. The department will leverage the use of Facebook, blogs, Youtube, podcasts, and e-blasts to effectively convey their message. This related to another important goal



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of getting the entire county access to high speed internet. Sam further explained how Kent County is ahead of many MD counties in that they are building a high speed internet infrastructure that cost over \$20 million and will deliver fiber internet to the home. The department wants to use high impact marketing that will generate awareness, ideas and conversations, and create investment and jobs in Talbot County.

Ryan summarized Sam's thoughts and said that the team is energetic to serve the county. He feels that the department's primary focus is customer service. He stated that one of the first steps to achieve their goal is to create an actionable check list. This will be accomplished by updating the Strategic Plan that was completed by the Sage Policy Group in 2013. The department and EDC will have a "listening tour" in each incorporated town to receive feedback from businesses, community leaders, and the public. The meetings will be held in lieu of the EDC meetings. Locations will be announced soon.

An open discussion then began about Talbot County's need for high speed internet for all residents. Craig Warner stated waterfront homes in Talbot County are difficult to sell due to lack of high speed internet. Sam stated that he and Cassandra met with Hugh Grunden, President of Easton Utilities, to explore marketing existing gigabit internet throughout Easton. Andy Hollis spoke on behalf of the county government and said this issue will be a major part of the upcoming budget for the county council. Andy stated that the revenue cap needs to be modified to allow for this type of growth. Jennifer Williams stated the county does not benefit from a broader tax base as tax revenues are affected.

Andrea Lev asked the department if there was demographic data available for the types of tourist that visit our county. Cassandra responded by discussing the data available that indicates Talbot County is a destination for couples. People come from more than just D.C. Baltimore and Virginia, but worldwide, including French, German and British tourists. The tourism office plays a large role in attracting these visitors. The tourism office has accomplished the majority of its goals since Cassandra began years ago. Andrea then questioned what are we doing as a county to attract individuals 60 and older. Gerald O' Mara stated hunting and sporting activities attracts a large portion of tourists for all ages. They may come for a guided hunt and return with larger groups, their family, and could end up buying a home here. The department should leverage marketing dollars to attract these kinds of individuals who spend significant amounts of money in our county.

Bob Shaffer, a custom home builder, explained how North and South Carolina attract retirees. He stated that it's crucial to catch the attention of these unique and qualified individuals. It was mentioned that our county offers a lifestyle and gets the attention of specific individuals through national foundations including the Aspen Institute, Beacon Group, and non profits in Washington D.C.



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Ron Engle stated that all of these discussions relate to the importance of the Town of Easton council working with the EEDC, EDC, and Talbot County to achieve common goals. Jennifer Williams solidified this statement by stressing the importance of collaboration. Everyone in the room agreed and supported these mentioned efforts which focus on increased employment and residency.

#### **Director's Report**

Tim showed his appreciation for the new department and is enthusiastic about their passion to move Talbot County forward. He thanked the team for their presentation. He believed the data presented was on point, most specifically regarding the marketing campaign and importance of digital media. Tim reported that Secretary Gill of the Maryland Department of Commerce stated (at the MEDA conference held at the Hyatt in December) that Talbot County was not open for business. Tim said we need to change this and the team in place will continue to improve this view of the county. He stated that the EDC needs to stress the importance of the listening tour meetings, specifically to community leaders and business owners so we can hear their concerns.

Tim went on to introduce Dr. Clayton Railey, Vice President for Workforce and Academic Programs at Chesapeake College. Dr. Railey lives in Oxford and is the new "at large" member of the EDC. Dr. Railey thanked everyone for the opportunity and looks forward to helping in any way possible. He further reported that he will be hosting a five county meeting with K through 12 leaders to discuss how they can better collaborate to serve the community regarding workforce development. Tim reassured everyone that Chesapeake College is open for career and technical trade training. The college is currently re-organizing their structure to ensure students come first.

Ted Bautz stated that the next EDC Business Environment committee meeting will be held on January 17<sup>th</sup> at Bay Street.

Andy Hollis had no further business. Jennifer Williams told the room to lobby the county council for the upcoming important decisions regarding the revenue cap and fiber broadband.

Scott Beatty asked Jennifer if it would be appropriate for the EDC to write a strong letter of recommendation to the county council in support of fiber broadband to the home. In addition, Scott said an op-ed piece in the paper would be beneficial too.

Ron Engle reported that the Easton Town Council is continuing to work on the Port Street Development Project. Also, a German based grocery store went before the planning commission for a proposed location next to BJ's Wholesale (behind Target). In addition, he mentioned his



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concerns for Key Lime Taxi which is operating in town without vehicle inspections. He feels this is a general oversight and is a public safety concern.

Mike Henry reported that the airport environmental assessment was submitted to the FAA. A target review date is April 1st.

There being no further business, Ted Bautz moved to adjourn the meeting.

### **Next Meeting**

The next strategic planning committee meeting will be on January 5<sup>th</sup> at 215 Bay Street, conference room 1. This will be a strategic planning meeting for the upcoming listening tour throughout Talbot County, with meeting dates and locations described below.

Town of Easton meeting will be held February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8 am, at the Talbot County Community Center Wye Oak Room

Town of Trappe meeting will be held March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8 am, at the Trappe Fire Hall

Town of Oxford meeting will be held April 6<sup>th</sup>, 8 am, at the Oxford Community Center

Town of St. Michaels will be held May 4<sup>th</sup>, 8 am, at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum Auditorium

Town of Queen Anne: to be announced.

Respectfully submitted,

Ryan Snow